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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3035
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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: LETTER FROM THE MINISTER OF EMERGENCY SITUATIONS TO THE SECRETARY OF HOMELAND SECURITY

SIPDIS

REF: 06 BAKU 362

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; NOT FOR INTERNET DISTRIBUTION

¶1. (U) This is an action request; please see para 3.

¶2. (U) Below is the text of a May 10, 2007, letter from Kamaladdin Heydarov, Minister of Emergency Situations of the Republic of Azerbaijan, to The Honorable Michael Chertoff, Secretary of Homeland Security, which the Embassy has been asked to forward. The original will be sent via diplomatic pouch:

BEGIN TEXT

Dear Mr. Secretary,

As you probably know, Azerbaijan and the United States have a strategic relationship and meaningful cooperation in the fields of energy, security, and other (sic). Azerbaijan was among the first to support the American nation immediately after the tragedy of September 11, and sent peacekeeping troops to Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as previously to Kosovo. Azerbaijan has also helped combat nuclear proliferation, arms and drug smuggle (sic), both on its land and maritime borders.

In 2005 the Azerbaijan Government recognized the need to create a special ministry tasked with all emergency situations such as fires on land and sea, natural disasters, nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) threats, and civil defense, which at the same time would be bringing together other relevant state bodies and agencies of the country. After the Ministry of Emergency Situations was established, we started intensive cooperative efforts with our Western partners to learn from best practices and deepen our collaboration with our partners.

Accordingly, we would like to start our cooperation with the United States through the Department of Homeland Security, as our close counterpart and itself a new organization. As a first important step in this regard, we want to invite you to visit Azerbaijan this year, to see the results of our intensive work and together consider how to broaden and deepen the cooperation between our two organizations.

Looking forward to hearing from you, and greet you in Baku.

Sincerely yours,

Kamaladdin Heydarov

END TEXT

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT AND ACTION REQUEST: The Ministry of Emergency Situations, created in December 2005, is a powerful and important Ministry that has consolidated key functions -- including emergency response services, civil defense, nonproliferation, some responsibility for pipeline security, and oversight of construction -- once disbursed across a range of government agencies (reftel). Minister Heydarov, the former Chair of the State Customs Service, is reputed to be one of the most powerful and influential figures in Azerbaijan. He has traveled widely in his new capacity as Minister of Emergency Situations, including to Russia, France, and the UK, and is eager for expertise -- and equipment -- from abroad that will help him carry out his new mandate. The Embassy has provided limited training and expertise to the Ministry through our Office of Defense Cooperation, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, and the State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security, and is exploring new cooperation with the U.S. Department of Energy. Engagement by DHS with this important new Ministry would be useful in strengthening our relationship and in advancing U.S. objectives with Azerbaijan.

Action Request: Please advise on response.

HYLAND